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January 3, 1966

The President
The White House
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. President:

Perhaps more than most, those of us who write are prone to believe we understand more than others, to nurture a secret feeling of intellectual omnipotence. Is it not possible politicians find the same belief lurking in their minds?

Yet I venture to suggest that the most terrible problem that now confronts you - and I say "you", not because it doesn't confront us all, but because it will be the measure history takes of you alone, above all, the single standard by which your countrymen of the future will evaluate and recall your Presidency - is susceptible of a remarkably simple yet entirely satisfactory solution.

First, let me assure you of my sympathy, deeper than I can express, for your plight, for I believe I understand its root and that you do not and cannot. I believe that in the modern world the President is a captive of his office and his advisors, and that he, more than he can ever comprehend, is the creature of his advisors, no matter what the personal bond between him and them, no matter what their dedication to him. He knows what they tell him, and, human as they are, they tell him what they want him to know. He thinks that, with the massive information-gathering facilities at his disposal, he is the world's best informed man; but he is conditioned and his mind fixed by the manner in which he is informed and by those things of which, in the whole picture, he is told nothing.

More than any of us who suffer and will suffer from it, you are the victim of the legacy of previous administrations. Before you took office, the situations you face were being created for you to have to have to face them. The people to whom you must now look for advice and counsel, those from whom you must draw your knowledge and understanding, are all involved in this, for even those of your personal staff must, of necessity, draw upon others. They have their lives, their careers, their errors to justify, and they bend you to that purpose.

Step by irrevocable step, you have been led into a trap from which there seems to be no satisfactory exit. You were told (unless we have been misinformed) that the guerrillas in South Viet-Nam could not con-

time were it not for "infiltration" from the North, and that by bombing the North we could end this infiltration and "force" the North to sit down and negotiate. I daresay you haven't had the time to read the State Department White Book on just this infiltration of men and arms. Were you to do so, you would find that it, in fact, says we had no proof of either! I have read it, very carefully, and assure you that you and the world have been lied to. If you ask why, perhaps one of your trusted among historians can tell you of the Manchurian career of Japanese Captain (later General) Doihara. And by now it is clear that, just as we would not, the other side will not bow to threats and pressures. They possess all the characteristics of manhood we have, though we call them "gooks".

By now it is clear we stand alone save for the minuscule contributions of manpower, essentially from our mendicants, who demand more of us in return. This can mean only that the rest of the world is cowardly or that they oppose us. We have never been so alone, as we should be, for we have never been so wrong.

This problem was "solved" in 1952. Have you, personally, ever read the provisions of the Geneva accord to which we formally bound ourselves to abide? Do you know that from the time he echoed the formal statement of Bedell Smith until the day he died, Secretary Dulles did all he could to frustrate it, and that he dishonored us, regardless of what he conceived his motive to be, by relentlessly - even openly - violating it? This is not the morality and posture I want in my country, nor do I think it is what you want. We alone, to begin with, were the violators of this accord, and it is a great shame upon us.

When men have personal disputes, the options they face are simple. They fight it out, solving nothing and convincing no one, or, as you have so often and so wisely said, they reason together. The large and powerful man who does not smash his smaller and weaker adversary is not looked upon by decent people as either a coward or a sissy if he acknowledges his own error. Rather, is he respected and honored for his integrity, and other men look up to him. For some strange reason, governments seem to feel otherwise, despite the clear record of history (for example, President Kennedy after the Bay of Pigs) to the contrary. We must have the same high standards in the conduct of affairs between nations that we have between men.

Of what good is all our prayer, all our dedication to religion, if we are incapable of living by these concepts? Might does not make right, and I think we should all pray that it never does, though we be the mightiest.

The enormous press of your responsibilities denies you what our lives afford most of us, time for relaxing reading and study. I regret this very much, for the demands we put upon your office inhibit your capacity for discharging it. But if you could only read a few passages from the Schlesinger and Sorenson books and see the meticulous documentation of the terrible things done about both Cuba and Southeast Asia by people of great sincerity in deceiving themselves and President Kennedy and leading him to wrong decisions; of the overwhelming indictment of the same wrongs done President Eisenhower, you would, I think, understand

and see clearly what I am trying to say. The documentation of the step-by-step entrapment of President Kennedy and the country by both the CIA and the military, with the lusty cooperation of the State Department, in the Bay of Pigs and, alas, only too many other places, is also clear in "The Invisible Government". There is every reason to believe the same people and their successors are doing the same things today.

So here you and we are, confronted with a horror with which we can neither live nor sleep, in which we are incinerating guiltless people, largely women and children. The more we scorch them, the more of our treasure (and our greatest treasure, our manhood) that we devote to this evil deed for what we call a good purpose, the further we are from the realization of that purpose, and the less of the decent regard of mankind we have and the lower we stand in our own estimations. Each step upon which you have been led down this primrose path, if you will but think about it, has actually led you further away from your goal. Every measure has failed and, worse, has had the opposite from the predicted effect. How long can you or we listen to and credit those who have such an inviolate record of being always wrong? Can we expect that some magic will suddenly make wrong into right? Life is not that way.

What, then, can be done? The answer, to one who does not carry your burden on his shoulders, as I freely acknowledge, is clear and simple: Conduct our governmental affairs as we do our private relationships. I am not suggesting that you go on television, bare your chest and shout "Mea culpa". But I do think you have an honorable possibility. It is, to me, obvious and, I believe, at even this late hour, can and will succeed and can and will redeem for us much of the honor we have lost and have deserved to lose.

Declare that you call upon everyone involved to immediately and unreservedly live up to the provisions of the 1954 Geneva accord, pledge us to do so, and ask U Thant, who has not only his position but the virtue of his color, to oversee and guarantee performance.

This, above all, is the word we have given. Those other pledges your advisors have written into your speeches have no more standing in a decent society than a man's promise to take his neighbor's wife. We bound ourselves to abide by this agreement. Late as is the hour, it is not too late.

Besides, there can be no other viable solution.

Should we be the ones who make the "demand", I have no doubt your advisors and counsellors can make it seem as though its acceptance will be a great "victory" for "us". But I also believe that it is both an honorable and possible solution, from which we can expect gratitude from the rest of the world.

And I would suggest, entirely aside from the fact that it is right, that it is a solution your countrymen will remember and honor when next they ballot.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg